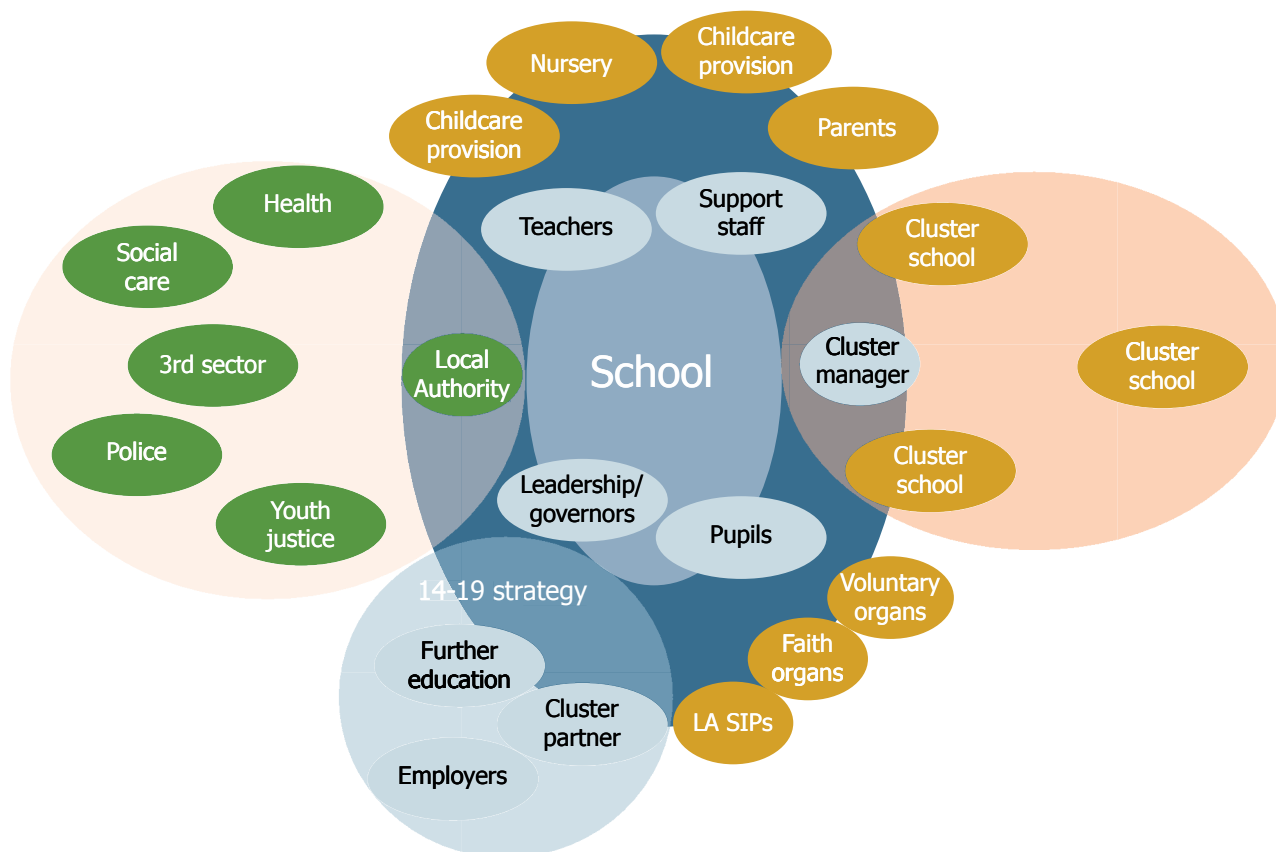


# Network Schools

making the whole  
greater than the sum of the parts



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## Introduction

For decades educational leadership was understood in terms of institutional leadership: the responsibility for the success and effectiveness of a specific school or college. In many places the nature and purpose of educational leadership is changing as centralised support is reduced and schools become more autonomous. This has led to models of interdependence and collaboration – the network school.

Michael Fullan<sup>1</sup> (2004) said: 'A new kind of leadership is necessary for breaking through the status quo. Systemic forces, sometimes called inertia, have the upper hand in preventing system shifts. Therefore it will take powerful, proactive forces to change the existing system (to change context). This can be done directly and indirectly through system thinking in action. These new theoreticians are leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organisations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking to other parts of the system. These leaders in turn

must develop other leaders with similar characteristics'. In January 2007 PricewaterhouseCoopers<sup>2</sup> published an independent study into the state of school leadership in England for the Department for Education. It identified five broad models of school leadership:

- Traditional model– the leadership team is comprised exclusively of qualified teaching staff and typically includes a headteacher supported by a deputy and/or assistant heads
- Managed model – a flatter management-style structure in which specific roles are allocated on the senior leadership team for support staff
- Multi-agency managed model – Again a flatter structure but more outward looking and inter-agency focused
- Federated model – characterised by varying degrees of collaboration between schools and sometimes between schools and other providers, for example 'whole town' approaches to schooling: shared strategic governing bodies, with executive heads overseeing several schools, and federation between schools, Further Education and work-based learning providers.
- System leadership model - embracing all the different roles that heads can assume beyond the boundaries of their own school.

Irrespective of the model, working in networks has enormous potential:

The leadership of organisations as natural systems wedded to modern networked communication patterns can help us work with rather than against the cultural diversity of our students, the professional diversity of our teachers, and the organisational diversity of our schools. Strong networked learning communities that have a compelling sense of purpose and work within clear parameters of collective, multiple and light touch forms of accountability, are one of the many strategies for restoring the rich diversity that years of standardisation have depleted or destroyed'. (Hargreaves and Fink 2006)<sup>3</sup>.

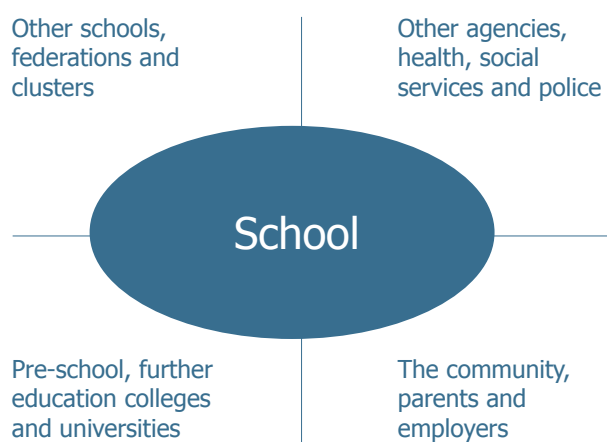
The benefits of working in networks have been summarised by Ballantyne et al<sup>4</sup> (2006) as:

- Networks create conditions for complex relationships to work
- Networks enable honest professional exchange
- Networks provide a model for effective professional and leadership learning
- Networks are hothouses for innovation
- Networks build bridges between different agencies
- Networks are a rich source of support
- Networks offer unique opportunities for support
- Networks are loci for system transformation

## Types of Network

Networks include forms of collaboration other than simply schools working with other schools. The Every Child Matters agenda had a focus on schools working closely with other agencies that continues to this day. There are

also examples of vertical integration where a headteacher has responsibility from nursery right through to 19 year olds and beyond. Working with the community and parents is yet another form of collaboration that schools have always been engaged in.



Collaboration in schools always has with the primary aim of improving the educational experience of pupils, but there are many other secondary outcomes such as professional development opportunities for staff, knowledge transfer, raising standards and helping schools that are in difficulty.

## School to school

Normally schools collaborate with others who are geographically close but there are examples of global partnerships that link schools in one country with schools in another using e-mail, social networking and webcams. This may also involve exchange links where pupils from one school visit pupils from another. The Department for International Development had established nearly 2,800 partnerships between schools in the UK and schools in fifty seven countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the UK **The London Challenge** was launched in 2003 by the Government and ran throughout the rest of the decade. It had three main aims.

- Transforming key London boroughs – Islington, Hackney, Haringey, Southwark and Lambeth
- Providing support for those schools on the frontline of breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment
- Providing a better deal for London students, teachers, leaders and schools.

It largely achieved its aims by partnering the best performing schools with schools not performing so well. The transformation that has taken place was acknowledged by Ofsted in a 2010<sup>5</sup> report.

'London Challenge has continued to improve outcomes for pupils in London's primary and secondary schools at a faster rate than nationally. London's secondary schools

continue to perform better than those in the rest of England. Programmes of support for schools are planned with experienced and credible London Challenge advisers using a shared and accurate audit of need. Excellent system leadership and pan-London networks of schools allow effective partnerships to be established between schools, enabling needs to be tackled quickly and progress to be accelerated’.

**National Leaders of Education** (NLEs) are outstanding headteachers or principals who, together with the staff in their schools designated National Support Schools (NSS), use their skills and experience to support schools in challenging circumstances. In addition to leading their own schools, NLEs work to increase the leadership capacity of other schools to help raise standards. In November 2010 an expansion of the NLE/NSS programme was announced. The target is to designate 1,000 NLEs by 2014/15.

In 2011 the National Foundation for Educational Research<sup>6</sup> undertook research on behalf of the National College. The findings below focus on London. They found:

- The support of high-performing schools was having a positive impact on the failing or underperforming schools.
- The group of NLEs was seen to be a high quality team that was fit for purpose, and the success of its achievements was widely acknowledged.
- Programmes such as national teaching schools enabled teachers to benefit from other teachers, allowed them to learn theory in a practical context and provided non-judgemental CPD.
- There is clear evidence to suggest that City Challenge system leaders’ own schools benefit from their role in supporting the wider system
- Leadership programmes offered through City Challenge are well received by key stakeholders, and are making a difference, in terms of attainment and achievement, in the schools of the participants.

**Federations** are the most formal types of school partnerships. They can be either ‘soft’ or ‘hard’. They involve two or more schools working closely together, sharing resources including staff, finance and knowledge and skills. They are not amalgamations because one school does not subsume another. The schools remain separate entities though in ‘hard’ federations they may share an executive headteacher or joint governing body or both.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)<sup>7</sup> evaluated the federation programme they funded between 2003-07. Thirty seven federations were funded to a total cost of £16 million on the basis of bids setting out the plan of their federation. They found:

- The ‘tight/loose’ nature of the programme stimulated and supported localised change focussed on issues and

concerns which have emerged from within the community concerned.

- Federations had a variety of goals but almost all sought to improve standards and half sought to improve inclusion as their main goal(s).
- Many different approaches were adopted to achieve the goals. These grew out of determination of priorities and were frequently based on previous collaborative work between schools that formed the federation.
- Federations generally placed a high premium on respecting and maintaining each school’s autonomy.
- Changes to governance were generally limited to what was necessary to achieve specific objectives.
- Changes to governance followed decisions on practice, they were not drivers for change.
- Barriers to success included the lack of a clear legal status of the federation director; tensions arising from imbalance of power in the successful school-weaker school model; and uncertainty about sustainability arising from the cessation of financial support at the end of the programme.
- The key factors identified as important for success of federations were leadership and collegiality. Federation directors and headteachers, together with chairs of governors in a number of cases, were the key personnel to provide leadership.
- The characteristics of effective leadership of federations were similar to those found in studies of effective schools and included: building upon past collaborations and good relationships; having clear aims and objectives for federating; developing collegiality, trust and effective communications; and adapting to the style of leadership required in the context of the federation.
- Most federations agreed a system of pooling an element of the schools’ budgets, or only used the project grant. Development of greater levels of joining budgets, and especially of a single pooled budget was rarer and linked to ‘harder’ federations.

## Schools and other agencies

The well-being of students assumed an even greater significance following the Children Act 2004. In the aftermath of the Victoria Climbié enquiry, there was recognition of the need to bring more coherence to the inspection of services for children. The Act placed a duty on children’s services authorities to make arrangements through which key partners work collaboratively to improve the well-being of local children. Joint area reviews, led by Ofsted, evaluate how well services, taken together, improve the well-being of children and young people in the local area. Reviews evaluate the extent to which the following five **Every Child Matters** outcomes are being met:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic well-being

Schools had a key responsibility for embedding the priorities set out in the 'Children's Plan' and embodied in 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003). In many schools the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) and Extended Schools Services agenda has been implemented. Yet, for other schools delivering it has been challenging. This was a whole systems change model, which aimed to:

- Introduce joined up children's services – including education services (0 -19), social care, youth, health, police and the 'third sector' providing a wrap around service to all children with a focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged
- Develop a Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Form Children's Trusts & local area partnerships, multi agency teams; extended services in institutions and in clusters.
- Provide integrated leadership systems led by a new statutory post – Director of Children's Services
- Build upon, in schools, workforce reform by enabling non-teaching staff to become part of a holistic delivery system
- Increase early years provision through children's centres, and some co-location of centres with schools, deliver health and parental support and engagement programmes
- Extend the 'core offer' entitlement in all schools by 2010 as service providers beyond teaching
- It required headteachers across the system to move to collaborative practices and to understand new professional languages, processes and ways of working outside of the education system.

In 2010 an evaluation of extended services by Dyson et al<sup>8</sup> found that:

- 66% of schools are offering all 5 elements of the full core offer
- 33% offering some parts of this
- 100% are offering some elements of the core offer
- A high % are offering the wrap around 8 – 6pm childcare
- 75% offering school premises for community activities
- High level of parent and community consultation around which services are offered
- Around 75% of schools are targeting specific groups of pupils and families for extended services, and these most usually were economically disadvantaged families, pupils with disabilities or Special Educational Needs.
- The majority of pupils would like their school to offer more activities before, after school and in the holidays
- Extended services requires on average an additional resources of around 133 hours per year across all staff areas

## Schools and the wider community

In 2007, to support the implementation of the duty on schools to promote community cohesion, funding was provided by the DCSF, in partnership with the Pears

Foundation, to launch a **National School Linking** programme in England, overseen by the Schools Linking Network (SLN).

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)<sup>9</sup> was commissioned by the Department for Education to conduct an independent evaluation of the pilot in 2011. Findings included:

- Local authorities (LAs) played a critical role in supporting the SLN programme schools. This included auditing local needs and cohesion issues and agreeing on priorities, then linking schools and providing three days training and support.
- Overall, the programme was successfully implemented across most of the schools. However, LAs and schools faced some issues around matching link partners (with some schools not being able to link with the type of school they originally envisaged).
- Most LAs and schools were planning to continue linking activities into the future.
- School linking can have a positive impact on many aspects of pupils' skills, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, particularly their respect for others, their self-confidence and their self-efficacy, as well as broadening the social groups with whom pupils interact.
- The programme is more likely to have an impact if there is sustained involvement (two or more link visits) of pupils in the programme, and impact beyond those pupils directly involved in linking activities is likely to necessitate a deliberate and sustained dissemination effort within the school.
- There is evidence that school and local authority staff also benefit from involvement in the intervention.

**Networked Learning Communities** was a project in England set up and run from the National College. It ran for four years between 2002 and 2006. More than 134 school networks took part, involving approximately 35,000 staff and over 675,000 pupils. Learning networks involve a group of schools, probably with other partners, joining together to plan, implement and monitor a range of activities that will enhance learning and teaching within and across schools and make a positive difference to pupil achievement. The NLC project helped develop a growing number of partnerships across the country many now involving working closer with families and the wider community, including other services, higher and further education, agencies, organisations and businesses.

In 2006 The National College published *Network leadership in action: What does a network leader do?*<sup>10</sup> The findings included:

- Working with staff from other schools widens knowledge and experience and provides a real opportunity for professional dialogue around teaching and learning.
- The talking and planning needed to review a network's progress really connects schools and helps build a shared understanding of each other's goals and values.

It also builds a secure evidence base for moving forward into the future.

- It requires sponsorship and leadership from the top, a planned strategy of involvement and clear communication.
- Financial and contractual issues can be challenging at the beginning and must be tackled rather than ignored.
- Although there can be extra work the benefits are clearly seen and this releases discretionary effort on the part of teachers and others.
- Schools are using a combination of coaching and enquiry to improve the experiences of children in a deprived area. Teachers get free time and extra payment for their work so enquiry is seen to have a high profile.

## The impact of networks

In 2006 The National College<sup>11</sup> carried out a literature study based on fourteen international studies on the impact of networks on pupils, practitioners, organisations and the communities they serve. Five key themes were considered:

### Impact

- Pupil impact included improved attainment, engagement, motivation, self-confidence and increased independence as learners. Pupils gained new skills, such as problem solving, leadership, social and higher order thinking skills. In some cases, a greater number of pupils were found to be completing their schooling, attending college and progressing into employment.
- Teacher impact included gains in knowledge, understanding and skills, leading to more inclusive practice, better classroom level skills, new communication and networking skills and greater understanding of the learning process.
- School impact included increased community liaison, development of professional learning communities and skills in importing new ideas. There were also changes in school and classroom organisation and management structures.
- Other impacts included increased parental involvement in goal setting, assessment and support, school decision-making and parental mentoring programmes.

### Transfer of knowledge and skills

- Peer-to-peer collaboration was widely used to support the transfer of knowledge and practice.
- 'Expert' input was a factor in nearly all of the studies. Experts' contributions ranged from training to strategic advice and facilitation, while the experts themselves ranged from teacher mentors to career specialists and parents.
- Face-to-face contact was more widely reported than ICT or printed communications. This ranged from collaborative on-site planning and reflection to coaching and mentoring.
- Half of the networks made use of events which included

conferences, symposia and other formal meetings. 'Training' events acted as vehicles for increasing the number of colleagues able to describe and use new knowledge. In many cases these, too, were built in to the design of the CPD interventions.

### Goals and target groups

In turn, the schools and other partners involved in the most effective networks reported an increased sense of inclusiveness and empowerment amongst themselves. They also experienced a reduction in isolation as a result of working collaboratively. The shared moral purpose and values in the network focus helped to build a sense of ownership.

### Partners

Parents emerged as key network partners. A number of the networks reported increased parental involvement. This ranged from becoming involved in goal setting, assessment and support, to greater involvement by parents in school decision-making and more participation in a parent-mentoring programme.

The range of partners involved in the networks highlighted the effectiveness of working collaboratively across agencies and sectors to tackle intractable issues such as inclusion. For example, where the goal was to raise progression, retention and employment rates for at-risk students, the close involvement of businesses in the training programmes clearly played a considerable part in the project's success. Where the goal was to raise attainment for minority students, district staff played a key role in school-community liaison.

### Network features

The majority of the networks were structured around a set of clearly defined aims. Size, scale and geographical spread appeared to bear little relation to their effectiveness, suggesting that it is the quality of the collaboration between local clusters within networks that impacts effectiveness. The majority of the networks had been running for two years or more, reinforcing the common sense link between duration and network effectiveness.

## Conclusion

All this has profound implications for leadership. 'The transition from being the leaders of a school to leading a complex interaction of relationships is very challenging... Any movement towards collaborative and integrated working faces issues of ego, territoriality, status and potentials loss. (Collarbone, P, West-Burnham, J, 2008)<sup>12</sup>.

But the benefits far out weigh the difficulties.

'Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching...The

power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things – for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still – working together generates commitment. Moral purpose when it stares you in the face through students and your peers working together to make lives and society better, is palpable, indeed virtually irresistible. The collective motivational well seems bottomless. The speed of effective change increases exponentially.’ (Fullan, M. 2010)<sup>13</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Systems thinkers in action: moving beyond the standards plateau, Nottingham, Department for Education and Skills, Fullan, M. 2004
- <sup>2</sup> Independent study into School Leadership, PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007
- <sup>3</sup> Sustainable Leadership, Hargreaves and Fink 2006
- <sup>4</sup> A, System leadership in action: Networks as the proving ground for system leaders, Ballantyne, P, Temperley, J, Jackson, D with Lieberman, National College for School Leadership 2006
- <sup>5</sup> London Challenge, Ofsted 2010
- <sup>6</sup> Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies: London Area Report, NFER, 2011
- <sup>7</sup> School Federations Pilot Study 2003-2007, DCSF, Report DCSF-RR015
- <sup>8</sup> Extended Services Evaluation: Reaching Disadvantaged Groups and Individuals. Thematic Review. Cummings, C., Dyson, A., Jones, L. Laing, K., Scott, K. and Todd, L. DCSF Report DCSF-RR196, 2010
- <sup>9</sup> Evaluation of the Schools Linking Network - final report Kerr, D et al, NFER 2011
- <sup>10</sup> Network leadership in action: What does a network leader do? The National College 2006
- <sup>11</sup> The Impact of networks on pupils, practitioners, organisations and the communities they serve. The National College 2006 (modified 2010)
- <sup>12</sup> Understanding Systems Leadership – Securing excellence and equity in education. Collarbone, P and West-Burnham, J. 2008
- <sup>13</sup> All Systems Go, Fullan, M 2010

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■ Pat Collarbone taught for 28 years in inner London and established a reputation for innovation and achievement during her headship of a secondary school in Hackney. In 1996 she established the London Leadership Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London. She has been Director of Leadership Development Programmes at the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Executive Director of the National Remodelling Team (NRT) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

Pat is an acknowledged expert on educational leadership development and workforce remodelling and has advised the Department, NCSL and TDA. In 2000 she led the development of the National Qualification for Headship (NPQH). More recently she has been working on a remodelling and leadership project in the Further Education sector. She is the author of the book 'Creating Tomorrow: Planning, developing and sustaining change in education and other public services'.

Pat received a DBE in 1997 in recognition of her services to education.